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NIDIA DIAZ
GUERRILLA COMMANDER

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Abstract

Women at war is a topic of high interest with limited information available on specific experiences. Military-type organizations exist that have trained and employed women in combat roles, yet the experience hasn't been fully or accurately documented. This project explores the experiences of Nidia Diaz, a female insurgent in the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC) of El Salvador during the 1980's. She held various leadership positions and was promoted to *Commandante*. The goal of the research was to determine if she was a successful insurgent leader.

Pertinent literature, newspaper accounts, government documents, and first-hand interviews were used. Chapter 1 outlines the thesis statement and provides the limitations and significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a brief background of the Civil War in El Salvador as well as an explanation of how the FMLN was formed. Chapter 3 traces Nidia's rise to power and includes why she joined the insurgency and how she became a leader in the movement. Chapter 4 addresses the role of women and outlines the problems specifically encountered by them. Chapter 5 covers Nidia's leadership style and abilities. Chapter 6 provides the analysis and evaluation of the data. When comparing Nidia's characteristics to the attributes deemed necessary for an insurgent leader, her accomplishments demonstrate her success. Chapter 7 concludes with an update on Nidia's current activities. She is now an elected national assemblywoman and is

currently preparing for re-election. She is still very much devoted to the cause and continues to fight for the rights of the people.

Chapter 1

Background

Introduction and Problem Definition

Women at war is a controversial subject of high interest with limited information available on specific experiences. In the United States, the debate has traditionally been centered around whether or not women should be allowed in combat. Their ability to perform combat duty is rarely considered because the data is extremely limited. On 28 April 1993, then Defense Secretary Les Aspin announced at a press conference that he was “ordering the military services to open assignments in combat aviation to women as a first step toward allowing them into virtually every combat position short of those in front-line ground combat units.”¹ Even though this was a step in the right direction, Maj Gen (Ret.) Jeanne Holm believes there are still three basic questions that need to be resolved: “the degree to which women can and should be involved; whether they should share, as a matter of citizenship, the same rights and obligations as men for their nation’s defense; and, if not, what the legitimate parameters for their participation should be.”² Today, even though women have been allowed in most combat jobs, cultural uneasiness still exists and the debate over opening the remaining combat jobs to them continues.

Thesis Statement and Research Scope

Throughout history and in several countries, there are many examples of successful women fighters. Women have been successfully trained and employed in combat roles whether as part of their nation's military or as part of an insurgent movement, yet their experiences have not been fully or accurately documented.

This research explores the story of Maria Marta Valladares whose *nom de guerre* is Nidia Diaz. During El Salvador's Civil War in the 1980's, she was a female insurgent in the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC). She was both politically and militarily active and rose to the rank of *Commandante* prior to her capture in April of 1985. There are many aspects of this woman fighter that could be explored but this research will focus on her role as a leader, more specifically, an insurgent leader. My question is, was she a successful insurgent leader?

Limitations of the Study

Nidia Diaz's superiors, who might have provided greater insight as to her leadership style and abilities, were not interviewed. In addition, the review of available literature did not provide any written information on the subject.

This is the story of one woman. It's not possible to generalize the role or competency of all women in combat based on this story alone. Furthermore, generalizations cannot be drawn about women who are members of a nation's legitimate military force based on the experiences of this female guerrilla.

Significance of the Study

This research will add to the limited amount of documented information concerning the experiences of women in combat. It may also provide some insight as to problems specifically encountered by women, which may in turn lead to potential solutions.

Overview

To tell Nidia Diaz's story in the proper context, the reasons for the Civil War in El Salvador will be briefly discussed. A brief history of the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN), composed of several subgroups, will also be provided. This will be followed by a description of Nidia's rise to power, her view on the role of women in the movement, her leadership style, and finally an analysis and evaluation of the data in order to determine her success as an insurgent leader.

Notes

¹Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military*, (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1992), xiii.

²*Ibid.*, xv.

Chapter 2

The Birth of the Revolution

El Salvador has become an example of a country successfully struggling through the difficult transition from a legacy of military dictatorship to democratic government while under attack by a foreign-backed insurgency.¹

—Edwin G. Corr, United States Ambassador to El Salvador, 1987

The Civil War of El Salvador has roots in the Indian peasant uprising of 1932. In that year, the Communist Party of El Salvador, led by Farabundo Marti, won several key government posts. The military regime of General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez refused to recognize the Communist success and nullified the national election. In response, Marti organized the Party and planned a coordinated worker's revolt and peasant uprising. The government discovered the plan and the military regime's response was swift. Marti and several of his colleagues were arrested and executed. Within the following three weeks, over 30,000 other Salvadorans, mostly Indians, were massacred.²

El Salvador has traditionally been ruled by an oligarchy of landed families. A wide gap exists between them and the landless peasants. Consequently, there has been a constant struggle for agrarian reform, as well as greater political and economic rights.

In 1979, another event took place bringing the country to the brink of revolution. The notoriously corrupt regime of General Carlos Humberto Romero was overthrown in a coup staged by a group of young military officers. They formed a government, including

civilians, of many political parties and announced reforms addressing the demands of the people. The oligarchy, supported by the rest of the military, prevented real change from occurring and between 1979 and 1981, there were some 34,000 politically motivated killings, many attributed to the infamous “death squads.”³

Meanwhile, several political-military groups had formed to further their ideological beliefs and combat the repressive government. In 1970, a small group of Salvadoran Communists broke away from the pro-Soviet Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) and formed the Popular Liberation Front (FPL). Their leader, Cayetano Carpio and his followers, believed in bringing the Communists to power through a prolonged war of national liberation. Two years later, the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP) broke off from the FPL because they believed in winning power through urban terrorism and insurrection. In 1976, after serious debates and the murder of the ERP’s most prominent figure by other ERP members, a group of pro-political action members broke away to form the National Resistance (RN). Also during that time, another group known as the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC) broke away from the ERP and began to form. It was led by a man using the name Roberto Roca and consisted of radical university students. Roca believed in a pan-Central American socialist revolution, not limited to El Salvador. This group did not have a very large following, it was only about 500 strong.⁴ Although it had contact with the other Salvadoran groups, it mostly operated on its own. The final group to form was the armed wing of the PCS called the Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL). It used its international Communist contacts to secure aid for the guerrillas.⁵ As revolution approached, Cuba’s Fidel Castro provided the impetus for bringing them all together.

The Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN)

The five insurgent groups were fragmented and had their own ideas about how to overthrow the government and gain power. “The greatest problem was that the different guerrilla factions hated each other passionately, and spent more time arguing and fighting among themselves than they did fighting the government.”⁶ Their in-fighting hindered their ability to gain outside support for their efforts. “As a condition of his support, Fidel Castro demanded that the insurgents form one unified organization capable of speaking and acting in a coordinated manner. The “Unity,” as Fidel is reported to call it, was one of significant benefit to the political aims of the insurgent leadership.”⁷ The factions wanted what Cuba and Nicaragua had to offer in the way of weapons and military training. Hence, the FMLN was founded on 10 October 1980 and took the name Farabundo Marti to honor the struggle of their fallen comrade.

Notes

¹Max Manwaring and Court Prisk, *El Salvador At War: An Oral History*, (Washington D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1988), xi.

²Brenda Carter et al., *A Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadoran Women*, (San Francisco, CA: New Americas Press, 1989), 11.

³*Ibid.*, 13.

⁴Gilberto Osorio, Former PRTC Chief of Operations, telephone interview by author, 28 January 1997.

⁵Jose Angel Moroni Bracamonte and David Spencer, *Strategy and Tactics of the Salvadoran FMLN Guerrillas: Last Battle of the Cold War, Blueprint for Future Conflicts*, (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1995), 2-3.

⁶*Ibid.*, 3.

⁷Manwaring, 76-77.

Chapter 3

Nidia's Rise to Power

Given the political-military character of my work, I was given the rank of commander.¹

—Nidia Diaz

Maria Marta Valladares, better known as Nidia Diaz, was born to a middle-class family on 14 November 1952. She began the fight for social justice at the age of 13 when she participated in pastoral and literacy campaigns sponsored by social and Christian organizations. During her trips to the countryside to teach illiterate peasants to read and write, she became conscious of social injustice and exploitation. She became outraged by the misery in which the peasants were forced to live. By the age of 17, she began to understand the reasons for the exploitation and set out on her own to discover a way to end the injustice. In 1971, at the age of 18, she became active in the political struggle and at age 22, was part of the leadership of the Salvadoran revolutionary movement.²

The Student Struggle

The teacher's association strikes of 1968 and 1969 created an environment of struggle motivating many students at the National University of El Salvador to participate in activities to right social wrongs. During Nidia's first semester at the university in 1970, the teachers continued the struggle, fighting so the National University would be

placed at the service of the common people. Nidia joined the political student's movement of the university in July 1970. She quickly emerged as a student leader and became the representative of her class. In addition, she continued her literacy work by joining the Catholic Association of University Students (ACEU). The following year, the students supported the teachers as they conducted another strike. Nidia was studying medicine at the time, and the medical students showed their support by conducting the most radical forms of struggle by taking over buildings, encouraging combative strikes and using other extreme measures.³

As the guerrilla movement began to develop, Nidia's skill was quickly discovered. In her own words she says, "It was during that time, 1970-1972, that the guerrillas began to develop, and of course as one who was outstanding in the student movement, or in the spirit of service in reading and writing brigades, etc., being highly visible, they would discover you."⁴ She was approached late in 1970 to join and became a simple collaborator.

Joining the Insurgent Movement

Guerrilla cells began to form between 1970 and 1972. As a student leader, Nidia was very visible and her leadership qualities enabled her "discovery" by those forming the new guerrilla cells.⁵ She was asked to join the movement and in October of 1971, she became a founding member of the Revolutionary People's Army (ERP).⁶ In 1972, the Presidential election and an aborted coup caused more unrest. President Molina's authority had been weakened by the coup attempt and he wanted to bolster it. He chose "anti-communism" and "law and order" as the themes to strengthen his army-dominated

regime. “The scapegoat for his campaign became the University of El Salvador (UES), a target of increasingly frequent right-wing attacks. Charging the UES ‘had fallen into the hands of the Communists,’ Molina induced the National Assembly in July to issue a decree ending the university’s autonomy and ordered its campuses . . . occupied by security forces.”⁷ He essentially closed the university.

With the university closed, Nidia struck out on her own and supported herself through flower arranging, teaching flower decoration, and owning several flower shops. Her work brought her into contact with people from many different social sectors. Her mother’s career as a caterer also provided access to a lot of different people, since she sometimes provided the flower arrangements for the catered events. Not only that, her mother belonged to various women’s reform organizations. All of the above gave her legitimate access to different people and locations and allowed her to carry on clandestine work as an urban guerrilla while becoming more radically involved in the movement.⁸

The university reopened in 1973 under government control. Nidia changed her major from medicine to psychology to further pursue her commitment for social change. “When I began university I took Sociology, and understood the causes and that we had to organize society and that it is us, the men and women that make the laws and administer the government. All of this gave me the information I needed to judge that we needed to transform the country and join the guerrillas.”⁹

Her Training

Upon joining the guerrillas, Nidia received political and military training although she never attended a formal course. She learned her skills through lectures, discussions,

and by direct experience. The person who recruited her, Paquito Montes, was also her trainer. In October 1971, he convinced her to become a full member and gave her a weapon as symbolic oath.¹⁰ She was taught to take apart and put together the .22 pistol she had been given. Later, she learned how to use a rifle and was taught various firing positions. Her physical training included running, walking and climbing hills while being supervised and evaluated. Her mental strength was also tested. “To measure your strength they would give us tests to walk with a pistol at 11 PM. For a man it was easy, for the woman not as much because a man can justify being out of his house at night, a woman no.”¹¹

From 1971 to 1973, she was taught conspirative methodology and the techniques of an urban guerrilla. She learned sign and counter-sign, compartmentalization (cellular organizations), and clandestine operations. In her words, she was taught,

How to convince people that I was not up to anything. How to detect someone following me. How to frustrate attempts to follow in a car, by foot, etc. How to store papers. How to make contact with others. We read manuals. For example, we had to make maps, the structure of a neighborhood everything: stores, offices, security, people’s schedules, because later we might capture weapons from there and we needed to know the details of the neighborhood. I also had to read books that told of the experiences of others: Peter and the Captain (Bendetti), the Mother (of Gorki), Topolanski, “How the Steel Was Forged,” “The Longest Day of the Century,” history of El Salvador, everything.¹²

From 1971-1972, almost all of her assignments were aimed at strengthening her discipline. She tested herself on the things necessary to function in conspiratorial circles. She performed reconnaissance work, participated in many discussions on the revolutionary work of Lenin and Che Guevara, and practiced her skills with a weapon at target practice. Her military education consisted of on-the-job training and learning by

watching how others trained, since some had learned specialties in other countries. Joaquin Villalobos, Secretary General of the ERP explained it this way, “. . . the enemy’s offensives became schools for the training of fighters, the best schools of combative training. . . . We were also forced to solve the problem of learning military tactics in the daily clash with the enemy. We did not have a school where first the students graduated and then were taken to a theater of operations.”¹³ Some of Nidia’s later assignments included the retrieval of small weapons, typing stencils for a news sheet called “For the Proletarian Cause,” and recruiting sympathizers.¹⁴ All were aimed at honing her guerrilla skills.

How She Became a Leader in the Movement

Between 1971 and 1975, she worked very hard. She started at the bottom like everyone else by printing leaflets, making drawings of important buildings, and reporting what she saw. The leadership began to give her contacts in the labor movement and took notes on her timeliness and initiative. Her commitment was also tested. In 1971, she was told to leave her family’s house. She gathered her clothes in a small bag, left a note for her mother (who knew nothing of her activities), and left the house at 5 AM. Then she was told it had only been a test, so she went back home and ripped up the note.¹⁵ “All of that was evaluated and I did not stop fulfilling my responsibilities and these were qualities that were accumulated so that in 1973, I was part of the Political Affairs Coordinating body of the organization.”¹⁶

Between 1973 and 1975, an ideological argument occurred in the ERP over whether “the rifle ordered the party or the party ordered the rifle.”¹⁷ Because of this, the ERP

broke into several subgroups. One of these subgroups was the PRTC and Nidia helped to found it in 1975. That same year, she was given control of the peasant's zone. She stopped studying and left home for the countryside. In 1977, after several of her comrades had been captured, she went into hiding. During that time, she adopted the name Nidia Diaz, cut her hair, changed the way she looked, and didn't go into the city. From 1977 to 1979, she was involved in logistics, clandestine organization, and the organization of military cells. Before the coup in 1979, she was sent to Guatemala to work with the militias and organize more cells. She returned in time to participate in the great FMLN offensive of January 1981, even though she was four months pregnant. "We thought in 1981, we would force the government to restructure power, but no, they threw everything at us, they fired heavy artillery at us and aid from the United States started. I was at the front during the 1981 offensive and was part of logistics."¹⁸ She returned to Guatemala after the offensive to have her son Jose Alejandro, who was born on 2 June 1981, 5 weeks premature.

After the offensive, she was put in charge of national logistics and was elected to the national directorate of the PRTC. In January 1983, the PRTC held their third Party Congress and she was re-elected to the central leadership bodies of the Central Committee and the Political Committee, the only woman among 10 people.¹⁹ At that time, she was also given the rank of Guerrilla Commander of Guazapa. In 1984, she was selected as part of the FMLN delegation that participated in the peace talks with President Duarte at La Palma. Upon her return, she was sent to command the San Vicente province and on 18 April 1985, she was captured by the El Salvadoran Air Force.²⁰

Notes

¹Nidia Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, (Melbourne, Australia: Ocean, 1992), 188.

²Ibid., 58.

³Nidia Diaz, interviewed by Carmen Guzman in El Salvador on behalf of the author, 14 January 1997. Transcript translated by David E. Spencer, a noted expert on the FMLN who has translated many captured FMLN documents and has published two books on the subject.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Osorio.

⁷Tommie Sue Montgomery, *Revolution in El Salvador: Origins and Evolution*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 88.

⁸Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 185.

⁹Diaz.

¹⁰Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 184.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Manwaring, 68.

¹⁴Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 186.

¹⁵Diaz.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Osorio.

²⁰Diaz.

Chapter 4

The Changing Role of Women

I always gave the urban front war reports using men's names because I didn't want it detected that one of its principle chiefs was a woman.¹

—Nidia Diaz

The traditional role of women has always been that of homemaker, nurturer, mother, and wife. In Latin America, that idea is carried further in the “ideology of patriarchy which defines women through and in relation to the significant males in their lives.”² This idea that men dominate the women of this society is further complicated by *machismo*. Recognized El Salvadoran expert, Tommie Sue Montgomery, defines machismo as, “the attitude that males are superior to females by virtue of their sex; also a “tough guy” image cultivated by males in an effort to impress other males or females.”³ These patriarchal values combined with machismo make it difficult to envision women being successfully integrated into the guerrilla movement. However, out of necessity and desire on their part, they were. “The act of taking up a gun and entering a guerrilla band implies a new relationship of equality with men and a consequent change in patterns of role differentiation by sex.”⁴

The Participation of Women in the Revolution

Women from all sectors of society were moved to join the revolution for various reasons. Some joined to secure the basic necessities of life such as economic security, housing, health, and education. Others joined to fight alongside their men.⁵ “At the beginning, women’s participation was minimal, and was limited primarily to students and teachers. But with the advent of revolutionary peasant-worker’s organizations, peasant women have also joined the struggle in large numbers.”⁶ Gilberto Osorio, the PRTC’s Chief of Operations, relates his experience. Initially, the men underestimated the women. We separated them from the men, but that didn’t work. When the war became so crude, we armed everyone--children, old men, and women. We integrated everyone. It wasn’t a matter of sex, it was a matter of necessity.⁷

Salvadoran women make up 50 percent of the population and participated in the struggle on a large scale. “Thousands of women fight with weapons in hand in the militia, the guerrilla forces, and the popular army of liberation, participating both at the rank-and-file level and in the leadership.”⁸ Nidia’s experience supports this account. She points out that women are more than 50 percent of the population and that women made up 30 percent of the guerrillas [generalization of the FMLN as a whole]. She goes on to say, “The war had five fronts: the war front (four zones), logistics front (to secure every type of need), the urban front, the international front, and the fifth was that of the jail. At all of these levels, women were in the top leadership, in the intermediate positions and at the bottom.”⁹

Women's Work?

The war front in which you worked, determined the type of job you held. The women performed all types of jobs, from the traditional roles of cook, to messenger, to radio operator, and to front line combatant. "In the guerrillas, women participated massively in service works, propaganda, teaching, and in the combat guerrilla units. For every 30 combatants, 10 are women. Their participation is a national phenomenon."¹⁰ Gilberto Osorio refines the numbers even more, he says: "There were squads of men commanded by women. If you proved to be a leader, you were a leader. Twenty percent of the combatants were women in all capacities: shooters, explosive experts, special forces, everything."¹¹

Nidia worked in a variety of jobs while an urban guerrilla as described in the previous chapter. She was chief of the urban guerrillas from 1981 to 1983 and then became the leader of the rural front from 1983 until she was captured in 1985. She spent 190 days in jail and once released was assigned to international work. As a member of the FMLN's national leadership, she was involved in diplomacy and negotiations and considers these assignments as those that were typical for men. She explains why by saying, "There was not equality. For us women it was hard because even though one is capable of contributing, there is a tendency to delegate responsibilities to the men, to listen to them more. One has to talk more forcefully and do it well to prove that you were right. On the other hand, the men can make a mistake and not have to go back and prove it."¹²

Gilberto Osorio was a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee led by Nidia. He worked directly for her from 1983 to 1985 and offers another description of

her work. He says, “she had the complete political and military breakdown of the contacts in the city [San Salvador]. She also had contacts in the unions, the government, and the military. She knew exactly what was going on in the city.”¹³ From 1981-1982, she led a cell that developed a spearhead of organizers that were detached to work in the unions, urban areas, and the student unions of schools.¹⁴ The high command had given her the task of developing this intelligence network. She was a very important advisor because not only did she report what was going on, she articulated what was necessary to conduct the war using the information she had gathered. She was an expert on the city and acted as the “nerve center” of the organization.¹⁵ She was the only one who could articulate this information to the high command and they were located outside of the city. She reported directly to the Secretary General of the PRTC, Roberto Roca (real name Francisco Jovel). Because of her expertise, she was able to interface with the other groups in the FMLN.¹⁶

The command post where they worked was not located on the front lines but would occasionally come under fire and sometimes they would have to fight. Osorio stressed that they were part of the leadership and it was not their place to work on the front lines because it was too dangerous. It was a political-military struggle and political skills must be considered next to military ones.¹⁷ Although Nidia practiced both, her political skills were more pronounced. In fact she said, “In the urban guerrillas I distinguished myself more.”¹⁸ In the city, she worked on the political orientation of the people and had to confront social situations and unions. At the same time, she developed effective clandestine structures. Her jobs entailed making high political decisions, developing sophisticated plans for army battalions, military structures, and clandestine activities. She

was very effective.¹⁹ He believes the jobs could have been done by a man or a woman. “You could say that a man could do it better--but that was BS. In the top 10 high command of the PRTC, she was the only woman. She was chosen because she was more capable. Some of them [the men] chickened out. She took on the challenge and did a good job. If they were better, where were they? She could do it and they couldn’t. Only she could do it.”²⁰

She exercised her military skills while in the field where she commanded the guerrillas in the province of San Vicente. Her work there can be compared to that of an American commander who plans and directs the actions of his troops vice being directly involved in the actual fighting. Nidia was asked if women served more as fighters or leaders and she responded: “It depended, because to reach a leadership position and give orders, one had to have been a fighter.”²¹ She did not give any personal examples of her fighting experience but said, “In the urban guerrillas I was directly in combat, but in the rural guerrillas, in the terrain, I was more involved in leadership and direction than in combat.”²² When asked about Nidia’s involvement in combat situations, Osorio responded, “she would have been an excellent combatant in her younger days but, because of her commitment, she would probably have been killed. By the time the war broke, she was already in a leadership position and didn’t have to fight on the front lines.”²³ He goes on to say, “she couldn’t have been a good combatant [during the time he worked for her] because of her physical condition and she was older, not an 18-20 year old.”²⁴ His statement reflects his respect for her commitment to the movement and expresses his belief that her aggressive behavior would have gotten her killed had she fought more on the front lines when war broke out. His experience with her began in the

early 1980's and his expression of "in her younger days" refers to the time before he knew her when she permanently damaged her ankle in an incident that occurred while she fought as an urban guerrilla.

Problems Encountered Specifically by Women

The combat environment is a difficult one for both men and women. At times there is little food or adequate rest. There are a few things that women specifically have to deal with that men don't. One of them is the natural menstruation period. It was difficult to get sanitary napkins while in the field and Nidia recalled winning the right to have them included in their medical kits.²⁵

Pregnancy was also a problem although contraceptives were provided. "If the women were very young they adopted forms of behavior very similar to the men or concepts of life were emphasized that were not right, even though during times of war, love is made very freely, because of the feeling that tomorrow one could die."²⁶ When a woman did become pregnant, it created a hardship. "We tried to discourage pregnancy as much as possible because pregnancy meant the loss of a combatant."²⁷ Both members were counseled and they were separated as punishment. The separation was meant to be a deterrent to others. Sometimes, the women became pregnant and used it as an excuse for getting out of the war.²⁸

A woman's physical ability was also a problem at times since the guerrillas were constantly on the move and the packs they carried were very heavy. Because of this, women typically weren't used in the role of transporting weapons.²⁹

Machismo may have provided the biggest obstacle. Nidia feels overall there were not big problems for women but discusses her encounters with discrimination. She said,

“there were assignments that read, ‘It is better that we send a man.’ One had to continually prove that one was capable especially in situations that dealt with the use of force like in the urban guerrillas.”³⁰ The following example points out that not only did she have problems with the men, but with the women as well.

There were difficulties with machismo. For example: I had to go around with my backpack with dirty clothes and sometimes the lady comrades would wash the clothes for the men. That was a privilege. One day I asked a female comrade if she could wash my clothes and they began to talk against me and sometimes they would wash the clothes for the male comrades that didn’t have anything to do. Few women would cooperate with me.³¹

There were other problems with machismo. Sometimes people had difficulty accepting orders from her because she was a woman. At times, she would have to propose things twice. “One had to get their respect, not based on authoritarianism, but you couldn’t joke because they would be surprised that a woman was commanding them.”³² She goes on to say, “A man can make a mistake and nobody says anything to him. The woman had to prove that what she said was right. Many had the idea of ‘those old nags!’ If a woman spoke, they [those she led] were very alert to see if she would make a mistake.”³³

These problems played a role in Nidia’s career, but she didn’t allow them to prevent her from succeeding. The next chapter will focus on her leadership abilities and style.

Notes

¹Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 62.

²Nichola Gutierrez, “Women and War: An Empirical Analysis of the Motivations and Experiences of 15 Salvadorean Women” (master’s thesis, New Mexico State University, 1995), 16.

³Montgomery, 226.

⁴Jane S. Jaquette, “Women in Revolutionary Movements in Latin America,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 35 (May 1973): 344.

Notes

⁵Women's International Resource Exchange, "Women's Lives in El Salvador," *Women and War: El Salvador* (New York, 1980), 2.

⁶Association of Salvadoran Women (AMES), "Reflections of Salvadoran Women," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 34 (June 1982), 21.

⁷Osorio.

⁸AMES, 22.

⁹Diaz.

¹⁰Ediciones Pucallpa, *La Dictadura De Nuevo Tipoen America Latina: Situacion Y Perspective Al Iniciarse Los 90'*, (Quito: Centro De Estudios Del Pensamiento Socialista, 1990), 74. Translation by El Salvadoran Air Force Officer, Mauricio Bonilla (Jan 1997).

¹¹Osorio.

¹²Diaz.

¹³Osorio.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Diaz.

¹⁹Osorio.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Diaz.

²²Ibid.

²³Osorio.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Diaz.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Osorio.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Diaz.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

Chapter 5

Her Leadership

The effort to achieve recognition and acceptance of the idea that women should be treated justly is more difficult than the reality of women taking important roles in the system.¹

—Steffen W. Schmidt

Nidia Diaz has been in a position of leadership since she helped to found the PRTC in 1975. She describes herself as an independent person and considers the struggle to be first and foremost in her life. “For me the struggle has been my self-realization. My life has no meaning outside of it. My personality, my individual aspirations, and my most elementary ideas are all linked up with the struggle.”² She seems modest and gives the impression there is nothing out of the ordinary about her rise to a position of power in an environment dominated by men. From the time she entered the university, she began to distinguish herself from her peers. She assumed responsibility, had the vocation to serve, possessed a democratic mindset, and exercised her ability to propose solutions and make decisions. Not only that, she showed her ability to take on tasks and see them through from beginning to end. Her willingness to defend the principles of the struggle and pay the social cost of participation gained her respect and recognition. She believes her sacrifice and the qualities listed above allowed her to have confidence and the very capacity to survive and succeed.³

The Responsibilities of a Commander

As a commander in both the urban and rural areas, Nidia had anywhere from 4 to 300 people working for her.⁴ While chief of the urban guerrillas in San Salvador, she was responsible for many different cells. There was a great deal of activity in the city, including protests and civil disobedience, as well as many other forms of mass action. Each one of her cells existed to handle a specific area of the struggle. Since her organization was compartmentalized, she would meet with the leaders of each cell individually, but could not meet with them all at the same time. For example, it was her responsibility to ensure the leader of logistics did not know the leader of the combat cells.⁵

In military formations, while a commander in the field, she had up to 300 people under her command. When asked if she had to behave like a man to succeed, her response was, “more than like a man, we had to push forward with our style as a woman but with the same basic norms of the guerrillas. We would call formation, command voice: ATTENTION! AT EASE! It is not that I wanted to act like a man but that I wanted to demonstrate the same abilities that we human beings can have. That the woman can do the same as the man in the sense of the abilities and capabilities to fight.”⁶

Her Character and Leadership Style

It is difficult for people to describe their own character and leadership style. Nidia was no different. When asked what her leadership style was she replied, “I worked a lot with the bases [the lowest ranking people]. My characteristic is to be very communicative with them. I am temperamental at times and I demand a lot from myself and I try to

demand a lot from the people.”⁷ Gilberto Osorio, who once worked for her, provided more insight.

She was a very strong woman who was committed to the cause of the revolution. As for her leadership style, she was extremely ideological and firm about sticking to her principles. “If she assigned you a task, she held you responsible but constantly encouraged you no matter what.”⁸ She tried to maximize our resources and provided whatever was necessary. We were also given a lot of leeway and allowed to take the initiative which we didn’t always have in the guerrillas. “In her command she was feminine. She couldn’t scream at anyone and even when she didn’t know the commands, she demanded seriousness. Some mocked her, but eventually the people became accustomed to it. She was not macho but very businesslike.”⁹ Also not one to gossip, she never talked about emotional issues, other people’s personalities, or about what she was doing. She worked a lot and slept only four to five hours a night. “The other commanders would tease her and tell her she had that ‘Leninist Discipline.’”¹⁰ At times she could also be lenient and understanding. One day we were attacked and I left some secret documents out. I thought she was going to punish me, since she was so harsh about protecting her secrets, but she didn’t. She knew the documents were spread out and I was unable to get to them without endangering myself further. If she had any flaws, it would be that at times she spread herself too thin and was sometimes lax in security. Overall, she was a great boss and I would gladly work for her again.¹¹ In addition to his personal experiences with Nidia, Osorio related the feelings of the troops.

She was the natural leader. Because of her work from 1970-1979, the people of San Vicente grew powerful. They all knew her and she was beloved by them. Before we

went into combat, she would arrange a celebration in order to create a festive atmosphere to raise the spirit and morale of the troops. There were parades and good meals. To give them confidence, she would address the force before they left to confront the enemy.¹² “She was the chief, they recognized her as the one who developed the party and the organization. She was very important.”¹³

Nidia also had a special quality that set her apart from other people; she was able to communicate with everyone. There were important women in all the organizations of the FMLN and Nidia was able to relate to them better than anyone else.¹⁴ Her diplomatic skill allowed her to build bridges, break the barriers to communication, and provide for more frank discussions at a lower level. Osorio went on to say that she is now very popular with the people and he believes it is because of her communication skills as well as the fact that she’s a woman.¹⁵

Nidia’s Capture

On 18 April 1985, Nidia was wounded and captured with a backpack full of documents by the El Salvadoran Air Force. She was captured alive because the Air Force officers involved wanted to “bring something back.” They thought they were going to be heroes. Instead, she became famous and caused the government a lot of problems.¹⁶ Felix Rodriguez, also involved in her capture, said he would have killed her because she had a rifle and wasn’t surrendering, but he was out of ammunition.¹⁷ At first glance, her capture seemed to place a striking blow at the heart of the organization. However, this was not the case. Gilberto Osorio provided insight. He said, her capture was unfortunate, but she skillfully turned it into a victory. It was a terrible shock to us and I was really

depressed. It was a terrible loss for other people too. However, we were pleased when she came out so strong in the press, especially when she said, “You can skin me alive, but I will not betray my people.”¹⁸ While in jail, she isolated herself and became sort of like a myth, a symbol of persistence. Her time in jail was relatively short and she was never really replaced. As for the documents she was carrying, they were outdated and had been buried for years. We were in the process of destroying them when we had to move to escape the incoming attack. They were not incriminating, but were used by the government to generate a lot of propaganda. All the attention gave Nidia a certain stature and she used it skillfully to turn the situation against the system and come out ahead in the end. She was released in exchange for President Duarte’s daughter along with several other political prisoners and went on to become a part of the FMLN’s negotiating team.¹⁹

Notes

¹Steffen W. Schmidt, “Political Participation and Development: The Role of Women in Latin America,” *Journal of International Affairs* 30, no. 2, (1976-1977): 258.

²Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 188.

³Diaz.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Osorio.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Mauricio Bonilla, El Salvadoran reconnaissance helicopter pilot who discovered Nidia’s group on the day of her capture. Interviewed by author, 8 January 1997.

¹⁷Felix Rodriguez, former CIA agent, interviewed by author, 4 December 1996.

¹⁸Osorio.

¹⁹Ibid.

Chapter 6

Analysis and Evaluation

I have seen so much blood flow, and sometimes even been spattered by the blood of those I loved who fell beside me.¹

—Nidia Diaz

An insurgency is essentially a contest for legitimacy between a government and another organization whose members seek to gain power by seceding or overthrowing it. Given this political situation, what are the characteristics, skills, and behavior required of a successful insurgent leader? Ralph Millsap, former course director of the U.S. Air Force's Counterinsurgency Course, provided one method of determining these attributes. He suggested describing what the leader has done to move the organization toward its goal of legitimacy. Another view held by Bard O'Neill, author of *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, maintains: "the existence of intellectual leadership is necessary for insurgent success, because it provides strategic vision, organizational know-how, and technical competence."² A third view, put forward by Gerard Chaliand, holds that "in a guerrilla organization the leaders emerge in actual revolutionary struggles, elected because of their capacity, responsibility, combativity, initiative, political understanding, and deeds rather than words."³

The information presented in the preceding chapters shows that Nidia Diaz possesses characteristics of all three views. Her leadership abilities were evident early as she was

elected the leader of her class while attending the university. Once she joined the insurgent movement, she was an active combatant, especially in the urban environment. Her initiative, dedication, and commitment was reflected in each completed assignment. She proved her worth to the organization and was rewarded by promotion to jobs of greater responsibility.

She was also politically astute. She learned it was important to not only understand the reasons for the struggle but to be able to communicate them to others. This in turn helped her to recruit them for the cause. She made friends with a wide variety of people and developed an extremely successful political network of supporters.

Her leadership was responsible for the success of the PRTC's intelligence gathering efforts. As was mentioned earlier, her cells formed the "nerve center" of the organization. Without her expertise, the organization would be without its eyes and ears. Using the information she gathered, she developed a strategic vision to help lead the organization to successfully overcome the enemy. Her vision included modifying the infrastructure to fully meet the needs of the party. She continually monitored its growth to ensure her plans were effectively implemented.⁴

The ultimate goal of the FMLN was to gain legitimacy in El Salvador and have the right to compete with other organizations for the opportunity to govern the citizens of the country. Nidia elaborated on the reason for the war when she said, "the war in El Salvador has not been imported from abroad. It is the result of our country's economic, political, and social situation. It is the response to successive military dictatorships, the banning of political parties, and the blatant social and economic injustice."⁵ She clearly demonstrated her understanding of the political environment and focused her every effort

on correcting the situation. She was a driven woman and simply put she said, “first and foremost was the struggle, and I have to continue ahead if I want a better future for my son. I have to give it to him.”⁶

She heavily contributed to winning legitimacy for the FMLN. In 1984, she was the only woman selected as a representative to take part in the negotiations for peace with the El Salvadoran government. The negotiations did not result in peace, but it cemented her position as a chief negotiator. After her capture and subsequent release, she remained outside of the country but was active in generating international support for the organization. She later returned and took part in the final peace agreement between the FMLN and the government. On 30 January 1992, the United States Ambassador to El Salvador, Ricardo Castaneda, presented the United Nations Security Council with a letter stating,

I have the honour to transmit herewith the “Peace Agreement” signed at Mexico City on 16 January 1992 between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional [FMLN], which contains the set of political agreements designed to put a definitive end to the Salvadoran conflict.⁷

Maria Marta Valladares, a.k.a. Nidia Diaz, was one of the signatories. She helped develop the plan to restore human rights, establish an electoral system, restructure the national civil police, promote agrarian reform, and integrate former FMLN guerrillas into society. However, the greatest achievement was winning legitimacy for the FMLN. The peace agreement provision reads, “Legalization of the FMLN as a political party, through the adoption of a legislative decree to that end.”⁸

By comparing the three descriptions of an insurgent leader with Nidia Diaz, it becomes obvious that her actions and position within the FMLN clearly demonstrate her success as an insurgent leader.

Notes

¹Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 153.

²Bard E. O'Neill, *Insurgency and Terrorism: Inside Modern Revolutionary Warfare*, (McLean, VA: Brassey's (US), Inc., 1990), 73.

³Gerard Chaliand, ed., *Guerrilla Strategies: An Historical Anthology from the Long March to Afghanistan*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), 320-321.

⁴Osorio.

⁵Diaz, *I Was Never Alone*, 6.

⁶Diaz.

⁷UN General Assembly Security Council letter, addressing Agenda item 31, "The Situation in Central America: Threats to International Peace and Security Initiatives," 30 January 1992.

⁸El Salvadoran Peace Agreement, Chapter VI "Political Participation by FMLN," (UN General Assembly Security Council Annex, A/46/864 and S/23501, 30 January 1992). [English translation]

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Everything can be learned, from the simple to the complex and the woman, just like she runs the home, can administer a municipality or government. One never does it alone, there is always a group of people surrounding. It is not a matter of trying to be superior over men, it is simply a matter of enjoying ones rights as a human being and participating.¹

—Nidia Diaz

Nidia believes the insurgency was a success. She feels they brought changes to the country; from living under a military dictatorship to having an elected civilian government. The effort brought a new concept of public security that defined the state's obligation to look out for the human rights of the people. "I do not feel like we failed," she said, "rather we contributed many things to the Salvadoran people. I also feel that we are only halfway because we still lack the economic and social component and the political will to continue transforming what we started."²

Since the peace agreement was signed in 1992, Nidia Diaz has continued to work for the people. In 1994, she was elected to the national assembly and holds the title 'FMLN Deputy.' She is also the head of the congressional human rights commission and is currently preparing for re-election. To underscore the sacrifices she made and her commitment to the cause, she said, "Democratization in El Salvador--the impetus after

the dictatorship was started by the changes that we brought. For this we had to pay in blood.”³

Notes

¹Diaz.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

Appendix A

Interview with Nidia Diaz

Interview with Nidia Diaz

Conducted 14 Jan 1997 in San Salvador, El Salvador

Interviewed by Carmen Guzman

Translation courtesy of David E. Spencer

Q: What happened between 1971-1975? What was it that influenced you to make the decision to join the guerrillas?

A: When I started university in July 1970, no before that in 1968 and 1969 they had carried out the big ANDES 21 OF JUNE (teacher's association) strikes in the struggle for the [escalofon] (the structured appointments in the Ministry of Education) and that had created an environment of much struggle which motivated many students, at least in the sense that you can participate in a struggle and make things happen. In '70, when I entered the university, during the first semester they carried out the struggle of student commons (those that started in '69), fighting so that the National University be placed at the service of the common people. When I got to the university, as I had done social Christian work since I was thirteen years old, associated with the preaching of the Church, mainly in Liberation Theology (taught by the nuns of my school), I joined the political students movement of the National University in July 1970. I was the representative of my class and was also in the Catholic Association of University Students (ACEU) that did community work in the sense of teaching people to read and write. In 1971, there was the second strike of ANDES 21 OF JUNE. That time we did join in and we supported the teacher's strike as students. We carried out a medical students strike (my chosen field) to make the University change. We carried out the most radical forms of struggle. We took buildings, etc. It was during that time, '70-'72, that the guerrillas began to develop, and of course as one who was outstanding in the student movement, or in the spirit of service in the reading and writing brigades, etc., being highly visible, they would discover you. Beginning in the last days of 1970 I was approached to join the guerrillas. I began as a simple collaborator of theirs until 1971, when things came to a head and in 1972 they shut down the University. In that era I joined the ERP (Revolutionary People's Army). Even though I was in the guerrillas, we supported UNO (National Opposition Union) during the elections of that year. This is when they stole the victory from the people and many people joined the guerrillas. When

they installed the new president Molina in 1972 he closed the university because he thought it was the cradle of the revolutionaries. I began to work on my own. I have a work skill in flower decoration, churches, etc., and I more radically got involved in the guerrilla movement and the struggle became stronger. The great struggles: of the students and the teachers and also the social projects of teaching reading and writing and the work among the workers were elements that gave me awareness. From the time I was 13 through 17 it was the practice of social Christianity that made me aware. Before the University I did not know the causes of poverty in El Salvador. I was very aware because I had to go out to the countryside, and the peripheral areas (of the city), etc. When I began University I took Sociology, and understood the causes and that we had to organize society and that it is us, the men and women that make the laws and administer the government. All of this gave me the information I needed to judge that we needed to transform the country and join the guerrillas.

Q: How was your joining, how and when?

A: I formally joined the guerrillas in October of 1971. Between '70 and '72 was the beginning of the guerrilla cells and my process of student participation resulted in that I was detected, because I was visible in my work, I had the qualities so that other comrades who started the work came to me and made the proposal.

Q: How did you become a leader of the revolutionary movement.

A: Between '71 and '75 I worked very hard. I began at the bottom where any person begins. I ran stencils through the machine (printing leaflets), I watched areas and made drawings of all of San Salvador (important buildings, etc.) and made reports. They began to give me contacts in the labor movement, they began to note if I was on time, if I took the initiative. All of that was evaluated and I did not stop fulfilling my responsibilities and these were qualities that were accumulated so that in 1973 I was part of the Political Affairs Coordinating body of the organization. After 1975 they told me that I was going to be proposed to form part of the national directorate of the Liberation League and I went on to form part of that. Between 1971 and 1973 I belonged to the ERP, but there was ideological argument over whether the rifle ordered the party, or the party ordered the rifle and because of this we broke up into sub-groups and mine formed the PRTC (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers) but always part of the guerrillas. My participation started in 1971, but I always kept my name, and did not leave my house, I had not gone into clandestine hiding yet. In 1971 I was told I should leave my family's house. I got to the point where I gathered my clothes in a small bag and at 5 am., left a letter for my mother (as she knew nothing), but then they told me it was only a test and not for real, so I had to go back to my house and rip up the letter. I left my house in 1975, this time in the PRTC. Not because they were following me, but because I also stopped studying because I was in charge of the peasant's zone, so I went to live in the countryside. It was in 1977 that I finally went into hiding because they had captured a number of comrades (during the elections of 1977 there was much repression) and I adopted another name, I cut my hair, I changed the way I looked and did not go into the

city. From 1977 to 1979 I was involved in logistics, clandestine organization, military cells. During 1979, before the coup, I was working with militias and began to open work in Guatemala. In 1980, I was there and became pregnant by a Guatemalan. We thought in 1981 we would force the government to restructure power, but no, they threw everything at us, they fired heavy artillery at us and aid from the United States started. I was at the front during the 1981 offensive and was part of logistics. The boy was born in Guatemala and as we were clandestine we had to remain in hiding (with the father). I was in charge of national logistics until 1983 and was a member of the national directorate of the PRTC. As a party we held a congress in January 1983 and I was given the rank of Guerrilla Commander of Guazapa. In 1984 the command of the FMLN met with Duarte and he told us that he wanted to talk and I was part of that delegation. Upon my return I was sent to San Vicente and six months later I was captured.

Q: How did your training go that you received? How long did it last? Was it physical?

A: I received political and military training. I never went to a formal course. All of it was empirical (by direct experience). There were lectures, discussions, and handling of weapons. That of the handling of weapons started in 1971, they gave me a weapon to know a .22 pistol, how to put it together and take it apart. Later they took us along the coast to fire with a rifle, a rifle and in this way the different firing positions. They were supervised practices, direct. They would teach one person, not a group at the beginning. The physical training was to go out and run to go so many times around the stadium and they watched you, also long walks, and climbs up hills. To measure your strength they would give us tests to walk with a pistol at 11 PM. For a man it was easy, for the woman not as much because a man can justify being out of his house at night, a woman no. They also taught us techniques of sign and counter-sign, compartmentalization (cellular organization.), all of the techniques of urban guerrillas. This was from 1971 to 1973. In 1974 we still did training in the inside of places. Now for the army it was something else, another training. There we were empirical. I learned by watching others how they trained, others did go to learn specializations to other countries. I had under my command a political-ideological school and there was another military school there in the hills. But the basics of weapons training was in 1971 to 1975 because we shared it. However, during the time of the war on the front it was different even though in 1985 we returned to the methods of an urban army. Every day we got up at 5:30 AM and had formation that was structured, where they inspected your bearing and looks. After breakfast there was an hour of exercise to keep in shape and after we would go and run in the mountains. This was when we were a proper army. I did not go out and run because my position did not require that I do it. I did do the stationary exercises, but did not run.

Q: Did you have a trainer? What kind of suggestions did you get to be successful?

A: The person that recruited me was the one that trained me. He taught me conspirative methodology. How to convince people that I was not up to anything. How to detect someone following me. How to frustrate attempts to follow in a car, by foot, etc. How to store papers. How to make contact with others. We read manuals. For example we had

to make maps, the structure of a neighborhood everything: stores, offices, security, people's schedules, because later we might capture weapons from there and we needed to know the details of the neighborhood. I also had to read books that told of the experiences of others: Peter and the Captain (Bendetti), the Mother (of Gorki), Topolanski, How the Steel was Forged (title), The Longest Day of the Century, History of El Salvador, everything. This is what the tutor told me.

Q: What was one day in the guerrillas like?

A: At the beginning the sentry knew that we had to get up at 5 AM and we would go to a place to do physical training. Then to the river. Some would bathe every day and took advantage to wash the clothes. At 8 AM I had to be in my "office" which was a cabin or hut that at night was where I slept. In the day we took down the hammock and it was my office. We had the radio nearby and we would start communicating with those closest and then we'd start the meetings with everyone in the world. At midday we had lunch at 12 noon. Then we rested for awhile, this during a peaceful time. When there were operations we had to move to some positions to be in liaison with units that were in action. It depended on the situation. If it was a territory that was being fiercely contested, we had to be moving frequently. Later when there were incursions of the army we had to walk and walk until we came to a more secure place. At those times instead of working during the day we walked, although we always maintained communications and this was how we worked. If we camped at a place we had to work in that place. Twelve years went by that way. The columns were spread out. There was a time when we were all concentrated but then came the air war and they were all dispersed. This is when we started using guerrilla warfare tactics. So we weren't a target we had to disperse. Also, contact with the people. They gave us food, and we bought things from them. When someone committed a crime against the people we punished them. We created the 15 principles (rules) of contact with the people in 1984.

Q: Was that environment difficult for a woman?

A: Mainly being separated from the family, and the disintegration of the family. Leaving the kids. Second, to be involved in a work that was never her obligation, weapons and force. Even though the women might be working in the kitchen, the war got to the point where they had to be armed. The natural menstruation periods. Women had complications. We won in the camps the right to the sanitary napkin, that they should be included in the medicines. The work of the guerrillas. Many times only 30% were women. If the women were very young they often adopted forms of behavior very similar to the men or concepts of life were emphasized that were not right, even though during times of war, love is made very freely, because of the feeling that tomorrow one could die. Others did get married, a few we married under arms, a few couples. In 1983 it was during the "guindas" (mass movement of people fleeing from the army) that we were mixed in the people like Exodus in the Bible. We liberated the people so they would not be attacked.

Q: How many women were in the guerrillas? Were they used in different ways? What kind of jobs did they have?

A: There were 30%. Even though the women joined the war at all levels and in every type of struggle. The war had five fronts: the war front (four zones), logistics front (to secure every type of need), urban front, international front, and the fifth was that of the jail. At all of these levels, woman were in the top leadership, in the intermediate positions and at the bottom.

Q: Did women serve more as fighters or as leaders?

A: It depended, because to reach a leadership position and give orders, one had to have been a fighter. We have some in the intermediate commands that were very distinguished. I feel that women had more opportunities (or potential) as administrators at the medium command level. This is because they have more integrity. A combatant does not have the possibilities to contribute as much as when they are at the intermediate level, where they are involved with not only the military side, but they also see the political and they can contribute.

Q: What was your work? What kinds of tasks did you perform? Were there typical women's or men's jobs?

A: I worked in everything, in the urban guerrillas. I was the chief of the urban guerrillas from 1981 to 1983, and then the leader of the rural front from 1983 until they captured me in 1985. Then I was in jail. Then I was assigned to the international work where I was involved in diplomacy and negotiations. I was in the national leadership. These were tasks that were typical for men. There was not equality. For us women it was hard because even though one is capable of contributing, there is a tendency to delegate responsibilities to the men, to listen to them more. One has to talk more forcefully and do it well to prove that you were right. On the other hand the men can make a mistake and not have to go back and prove it.

Q: What kind of problems did you encounter being a woman?

A: There were evaluations that read "It is better that we send a man." One had to continually prove that one was capable. This in situations that had to deal with when there was the use of force, in the urban guerrillas. There were difficulties with machismo. For example: I had to go around with my back pack with dirty clothes and sometimes the lady comrades would wash the clothes for the men. That was a privilege. One day I asked a female comrade if she could wash my clothes and they began to talk against me and sometimes they would wash the clothes for the male comrades that didn't have anything to do. Few women would cooperate with me.

Q: Were there situations where the women were a greater help than a problem?

A: Of course, especially in the urban guerrillas. If I really dolled myself up I could pass undetected and in the car I had secret compartments with weapons, documents. When they (police or army) stopped and searched me and didn't find them they would even say "Excuse us Ma'am." The women also played an important role as messengers between the rural and urban zones. In this role they had the advantage. In the areas of health, education, logistical administration for example, a woman could bring in many boots, carrying them in their baskets for us.

Q: Was it an obstacle and why, being a woman?

A: We women are more than 50% of the populations. We have facilities and characteristics that permit us in the socio-cultural patterns to get involved in situations where a man cannot go or that they would pursue us from another perspective. But there were other obstacles in which the people thought that politics was only for the women (men?). This is mainly a cultural obstacle.

Q: In combat what was the attitude of the women? How different was the attitude of the men?

A: It was strong and aggressive. In the jail, the woman was much stronger than the men. Until today, hardly any woman gave in jail. 30% of the guerrillas were women. At first the better physical performance characterized the men, but there were women that distinguished themselves. However, for example if there was a unit of seven and there were two women, the women were treated more considerately. In the special forces for example there was not one woman that I know of because they would cover themselves with dirt and no one could detect them. The ability to maneuver was developed more by the man. In other places there were columns of only women. They did it different, only women of greater abilities.

Q: What problems did the woman face on the battlefield? Could they overcome them? How? Was there something that women couldn't do in battle.

A: I feel that there were not big problems for women. At the time of a battle the women took up good firing positions. However there were problems with weight, with carrying things. It was always thought that the woman couldn't carry as much weight, less tasks of transporting. However it was not normal for the woman to be involved in this type of work, like transporting weapons for example.

Q: Did your experience affect the way you view your gender or what you expect? Did the insurgent progress change your perception as a woman?

A: Very little. I was in the women's association from 1984 to 1986 and what we talked about was family, how to have personal relations with men, reproductive health, but we did not have the same gender of equality of opportunity, because we were in the very struggle. Once the war ended we saw the need to introduce an element of gender in

transforming the struggle. However, even in the negotiations we did not have those ideas and nobody called it to our attention. I was the president of the Melida Anaya Montes Women's Association (a slain teacher) from 1985 to 1989 and was the representative in the exterior of the woman at war. Because for the woman, as she solves her political, social and cultural problems, she will become free too. However, what is inter-family violence, something visible, was not talked about. When the truth was taken to the fronts, always machismo avoided it, irresponsible paternity (deadbeat dads) for example. Until the end of the conflict other dimensions of the problem have come up. It was until this time that the vision of gender began to arise.

Q: What was the contribution of women in the war?

A: It was a significant and determining contribution because without the participation of the woman and the missions that they carried out, the process of liberation would not have been advanced. Promoting the man in the war, the woman in the shelters, being a support in the rear, it was great. The woman in logistics, in the development base, and participating directly for example in the health brigades. (Note: nurses were called brigadiers "brigadistas" so I think she is talking about FMLN medical service.) Those who built the clandestine hospitals where the wounded recovered were women. When we began to expand the work, the women were given the job of organizing.

Q: If they had all been men, what would have been the difference?

A: Until now I have not seen a guerrilla organization that was only men. Always the women have historically joined, even if the percentages were small. They would not have had the experience of the integral liberation of the areas of action of the struggle. For example, all which was the humanitarian field was led by women. The struggle of the prisoners, the families, was led by women. In the rural front also, in the logistics field, food, making of clothing, shoes. (Note: There were two types of logistics in the FMLN. Those responsible for moving arms and ammunition and those responsible for other items. I believe Nidia is talking about the second type). In the military field it depended on the missions and tasks. I do not believe the woman was indispensable in combat proper, but so that combat could occur (Note: combat support) the woman had to be indispensable.

Q: How do you survive in a position of power in an environment dominated by men?

A: Since I started the university I began to distinguish myself mostly, assuming responsibility, the vocation to serve, the democratic mindset, the ability to propose and make decisions, these are the qualities which distinguished me. And the tasks from zero to when its done, someone who shows it and they begin to recognize you. The defense of principles and the social cost that one pays because I had the opportunity to say "No, I'm going to take care of my son, or finish my profession, I lessen my participation and that's it." But no. First and foremost was the struggle and I have to continue ahead if I want a better future for my son. I have to give it to him. That situation of sacrifice and

the grandeur of the struggle are the qualities that allow one to have confidence and the very capacity. In the military field there were also merits related to the urban guerrillas. For example haven given me the command, the creation of cells and in this way I was bestowed the rank of guerrilla commander. In the urban guerrillas I distinguished myself more. During the first ten years it was to develop and secure the financial and logistical base of the front, with the idea of self defense. In the urban guerrillas I was directly in combat, but in the rural guerrillas, in the terrain I was more involved in leadership and direction than in combat.

Q: Do you think it would have been different if your trainer had been a woman?

A: No because we did not have a gender specific training. It was more general training, maybe in the way they talked it would have been different, they would have said that the women have to fight, and not only think about the home. But I was a student, not a housewife. I recruited many women and trained many women and there was a difference, but in the way I talked: “Women are capable of making changes and not only to stay in the house, that we had the ability to participate the same as men.”

Q: How many people were under you?

A: I had between four and three hundred. If one is a chief of the guerrilla in San Salvador there is mass action (protests, civil disobedience, etc.), logistics, politics, conspirative work and cells. Each one was a structure and I had to meet with the leaders. I could not let the leader of logistics know who was the leader of the combat cells. I would meet them separately and behind them was another group. In military formation I had up to 300 people under my command. From 1983 I was in charge of training the guerrilla headquarters.

Q: Your rank?

A: Guerrilla Commander?

Q: Did you have to behave like a man to be accepted?

A: More than like a man, we had to push forward with our style as a woman but with the same basic norms of the guerrillas: We would call formation, command voice: ATTENTION! AT EASE! It is not that I wanted to act like a man but that I wanted to demonstrate the same abilities that we human beings can have. That the woman can do the same as the man in the sense of the abilities and capabilities to fight.

Q: Were there problems accepting you as a leader because you were a woman?

A: There were sometimes that I had to propose things twice. A man can make a mistake and nobody says anything to him. The woman had to prove that what she said was right.

Many had the idea of “those old nags!” If a woman spoke they were very alert to see if she would make a mistake.

Q: These people were your followers or those of the movement?

A: They were followers of the movement. I came out in public in 1985. During all of the time of the urban guerrillas I used a number of names: Gabriela, Esther, Carmelina. During the war proper I began to be called Nidia and in 1985 when they captured me, my real name was made public: Maria Marta Valladares. One by one your work can be a point of reference for others so they understand what the work of the guerrillas was like.

Q: Did some people have problems accepting orders from you because you were a woman?

A: Yes, sometimes they rebelled, but they became accustomed. They arrived and they would have to salute for example. We had to start a formal relationship even if we were friends. One had to get their respect, not based on authoritarianism, but you couldn't joke because they would be surprised that a woman was commanding them. These are the problems of machismo.

Q: How were the relations with your superiors?

A: I was always very respectful of my superiors. I continue that way. Every one is responsible. Currently the leadership resides in three people in the party.

Q: What is your leadership style?

A: I worked a lot with the bases (lowest ranks). I am very communicative with the bases. This has always been my characteristic. I am temperamental many times. I demand a lot from myself and I try to demand a lot from the people who also . . .

Q: Were you successful in the insurgency? How do you define those successes?

A: Yes, we brought changes to this country. From a military dictatorship to now being subject to a civilian government. We brought a new concept of public security, that the state has an obligation to look out for the human rights of the people. I do not feel like we failed, rather than that, we contributed many things to the Salvadoran people. I also feel that we are only halfway. Because we still lack the economic and social component and the political will to continue transforming what we started. One can make a contribution as a law maker to a society but it depends on who administers and if it is administered by a rightist force as has happened in this country. They can try to truncate or revert. We have to fight so it is administered correctly. Democratization in El Salvador, the impetus after the dictatorship was started by the change that we brought. For this we had to pay in blood. They did not give us free even a single comma [she is

referring to the negotiations for peace. She feels every single letter of the agreement had a price].

Q: How was your transition from guerrilla to legislator?

A: As during the last seven years my work was international, solidarity, diplomacy, negotiation, I was already connected with many sectors with my real name, Maria Marta Valladares. I was able to talk to solidarity movements, with governments, with political forces, press, and more that gave me possibilities to have relationships with different sectors. When we signed the peace and we returned to El Salvador, at first I lived in the Venezuelan embassy for a month and a half because we were afraid to return to normal life just like that, because of the rightist forces that were anticipating our arrival. I went around always expecting. Wherever I went everybody wanted to talk about the war experience, the Right itself would talk to one about it. At that time I did not go to the supermarket, the commercial centers (malls) because I felt something weird, I didn't know if those sectors would accept me. There was more sympathy than rejection. Later I began to get involved. Today I go to the school of my son just like anybody else, I go to the supermarket, even to church, wherever, as a judge for a festival, for a soccer match. That has been the total process of normality which I have experienced. I do in reality have some problems with protection. They wanted to kill me twice in 1994. What I miss the most is not being able to be normal in the sense of not being able to go alone here in the street to the supermarket, but that I have to always have my bodyguard. I wish I could go alone, make my life more private, but I can't now. I miss the times in which I went around by myself. Other times the press, sometimes I don't have any desire to talk, but my comrades told me that I had to take advantage. One wants to be at peace, but has to take charge of that political role. When I demobilized, I showed up in Usulután with my weapon (my weapon now because my real weapon was destroyed when they captured me) on the 15th of December, and I destroyed my rifle myself in front of the UN, one day before I became officially registered in the legal political party.

Q: Suggestions for women, military leaders and in positions of power?

A: We have to overcome the social cultural patterns that say to one that from the womb what role in society they are going to play. I believe that a woman can play a transforming role and be productive, create ideas and give very important contributions. She can and should be an active political and economic agent. It is not [vedado] nothing so the woman can cover the same areas the same as the man which is a socio-cultural problem of roles. In more developed countries, machines do women's work: wash, iron, and the woman can develop greatly, but in these poor countries what it implies is a great solidarity within the family so that the man gives to the woman the opportunity to become cultured, to rise above and contribute. This means that there is a division of labor and that the woman has time to rest and have opportunities. This happens first by the woman becoming conscious that she is not only to serve in the kitchen but that she can go farther. It is a rebellion within oneself. There is a system of opportunities that the state provides to give them that capacity to the women to have opportunities to get prepared. In public

offices the woman does not need to fear. Everything can be learned, from the simple to the complex and the woman, just like she runs the home, can administer a municipality or government. One never does it alone, there is always a group of people surrounding. It is not a matter of trying to be superior over men, it is simply of matter of enjoying ones rights as a human being and participating.

Appendix B

Interview with Gilberto Osorio

Interview with Gilberto Osorio
Conducted 28 Jan 1997 via telephone
Interviewed by Tracy A. Phillips

Q: What was your title when you worked for the PRTC? What type of work did that entail?

A: Chief of Operations of northern San Vicente province (battalion), then was a member of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of which Nidia Diaz was in charge.

Q: What did you do under Nidia?

A: We were in charge of ideological/military/organizational tasks. We tried to generate directives in general terms in terms of military activities and organizational growth. We coordinated steps to organize the people - football games, anything. We tried to structure the infrastructure toward the necessity of the party. We constantly checked on the progress. We also tried to avoid contact. We worked at the command level at command posts in the field. They were specifically targeted. We weren't on the front lines.

Q: Describe the environment, i.e., living conditions, day to day life of an insurgent, etc.

A: We got up before the sun because we were a target of night spotting on the part of the PRAL. We would wash at the river and the cooks would prepare tortilla beans and rice. If lucky, we would get an egg once a week. There were periods of starvation. Food was more plentiful when people were willing to help. If we had the upper hand we would eat better, if not, not so well. People would be killed if they supported the PRTC. Some units in the army changed their attitudes part way through the war to win the hearts and minds of the people. The Army would abduct people from the countryside against their will. Then they would choose the most skillful and most criminal--those would be inducted into the rapid deployment battalions, there were 5 of them. They would have to serve 1-2 years enlistment then be offered rapid deployment battalions or Air force or national guard. The army became a pyramidal structure of about 60,000. Before 1984, we lived among the population. Then came the "scorched earth policy," and the army

waged a war of annihilation. The Counties were divided by FMLN and Civil Defense. Everything was bombed. It is semi-rural, no place is quite isolated. We moved the population to refugee camps sometimes in Honduras to protect them from the attacks. After 1985, we separated ourselves in small units no larger than 50, then groups of 10, then not larger than 5 (inside enemy territory) because we were vulnerable to air attack. We lived in improvised housing in tents or constructed a campsite to avoid air attacks. El Salvador has a rainy season and a dry season. During the dry season, cover and concealment was hard to find. We camouflaged ourselves, used guerrilla tactics, and used mine fields to protect our flanks. We used natural items for camouflage.

Q: What was your relationship to Nidia Diaz?

A: From 1984-1985, she was in charge of a team of 4. She responded to Roberto Roca (real name Francisco Jovel) he is an assemblyman now too. It took about 3 years to articulate the consolidation of all the factions within the FMLN. [Here he talked a lot about how hard it was to coordinate the movement of the guerrillas, pull meetings together, and communicate with everyone across the FMLN]

Q: How long did you work for her? In what capacity?

A: I served with her for 3 years, from about 1984 to 1986. It took us a long time to move from place to place. We attended many meetings. We brought resolutions back from the meetings and then it was our job to process the information into pamphlets and directives. It took months to generate this information and get it out. Runners would come from many miles away to pick up the directives, sometimes walking for days. Sometimes the entire command post would have to move. It was very hard to coordinate everything. When the FMLN general command tried to articulate these things it became very bureaucratic. We spent a lot of time waiting for people to pass through the areas controlled by the enemy to get to the meetings. When people finally got together, we celebrated the fact that we were able to hold a meeting. We would celebrate by attacking the enemy since we had succeeding in consolidating the guerrillas. It took about 2-3 years to bring the factions together and become the FMLN.

Q: Did you know her before the insurgency?

A: Not really. She was assigned to Guatemala early on. She was called back after the congress [PRTC] was held to break up the party from focusing on all of Central America to individual countries.

Q: Describe her character

A: Very strong, committed woman on the cause of the revolution. She started when she was very young. She started to be a member in the early 70's. In 1971, she was one of the founding members of the ERP. Some members didn't agree so they separated and founded the PRTC in 1986 [other references show 1985 as the correct year]. She was

recruited by the church from the university to go to countryside and teach reading and organizational skills. These were the Ecumenical groups. This led to a very powerful organization that later became the popular movement that was the backbone of the FMLN. The structures were developed from the church. At that time, farm organizing was prohibited by law and punishable by death by the national guard. Only two groups of people were allowed to organize and they were the teachers at schools for education and the ecumenical society churches. The teacher's union became very powerful in the 1960s.

Q: How was she employed? What types of jobs did she do?

A: She had the complete political and military breakdown of contacts in the city [San Salvador]. She had contacts in unions, the govt., and the military. She knew what was going on in the city. After 1984, she was part of the high command. Before that she was part of the local committee in the city. She had a cell that developed a spear head of organizers that were detached to work in the union, urban areas, and the student unions of schools. She was in charge during 1981-1982. She was an advisor to Roca (Secretary General of the PRTC). She gave him the intelligence from the network she had developed. The high command had tasked her to do this. She was a very important advisor of what was going on. She acted as the "nerve center". She articulated what was necessary to conduct the war. She was an expert on the city which was the nerve center at the time. She was the only one who could articulate this information to the high command who were located in the country. She was able to interface with other groups within FMLN because of her expertise. She wasn't on the front line but at times we would get into trouble and come under fire. Sometimes we would have to fight. The PRTC was only about 500 strong. She was instrumental in promoting the inclusion of women in combat. Initially women were seen as the people who served us our meals. We had about 20% women. She [Nidia] wasn't the most physical but promoted women. By the end of the war they [the women] were completely integrated.

Q: Were they typically "women" jobs or "men" jobs?

A: She couldn't have been a good combatant because of her physical condition and she was older. Not an 18-20 year old. [He is speaking of the time frame that he worked with her, early 1980's] Her jobs were all to generate work. It could have been done by a man or a woman. Her job entailed making high political decisions, developing sophisticated battalions and military structures, and planning clandestine activities. She was sort of responsible for the political orientation of the people. You must consider politics next to military skills since it was a political-military struggle. In the city, she had to confront social situations, unions, and at same time she had to generate clandestine structures that could be effective. She was very effective. You could say that a man could do it better but that was BS. In the top 10 members of the high command of the PRTC, she was the only woman. She was chosen because she was more capable. Some of them [the men] chickened out. She took the challenge and did a good job. If they were better, where were they? She could do it and they couldn't. Only she could do it.

Q: How did a woman rise to a position of power in a traditionally male dominated society?

A: That's a misperception too. In El Salvador, 60% of homes are run by women and they alone raise the children. Women are the head of the household and the men are only the 'token vociferous' [his words]. They act macho but they are not in charge. The men were afraid. Women made the best of it. The macho thing is a facade. Due to social conditions, the women find themselves in positions of leadership because of necessity. Most people look up to their mother since most people were raised by their mother not their father. The men act macho to "catch" a woman. They have to find someone to take care of them. Women in El Salvador are in more important positions than women in the US. They are the head of the family and in government. But there are still no women in the military, they are in the police now. The army has become irrelevant.

Q: Describe Nidia's leadership style

A: She was very ideological. She will stick to the principles. She was very mean and firm about sticking to the principles. In her command she was very feminine. She couldn't scream at anyone. Even though she didn't know the commands she would demand seriousness. Some mocked her. Eventually people became accustomed to it. She wasn't macho. She was very business like. She wouldn't gossip about emotional things, other people's personalities or what she was doing. She slept only 4-5 hours each night. She was up before us and to sleep after us. Did she have insomnia? So she worked a lot. The other commanders teased her and said she had that "Leninist discipline". She was lenient. One day we were attacked and I left some secret documents out. I thought she was going to punish me because she was so harsh about protecting her secrets but she didn't. She was understanding of the situation and she didn't punish me. The documents were very spread out and we came under attack, so I was unable to gather them without putting myself in more danger.[He talked a lot about how they had trouble defending themselves from the air attacks, he described it as "learning" to deal with them.] We celebrated different things. We would have parades and a good meal before an attack. We would make it a festive atmosphere to raise the spirit and morale of the troops. She was responsible for creating the organization, the whole movement. She was beloved by those people [of San Vicente]. They grew very powerful because of her work from 1970-1979. They all knew her. She was the natural leader. She would address the force before they went to combat. She was the chief, they recognized her as the one who developed the party and the organization. She is very important.

Q: Describe her involvement in combat situations?

A: She would have been an excellent combatant in her younger days but because of her commitment she would probably have been killed. By the time the war broke, she was already in a leadership position and didn't have to fight on the front lines.

Q: Did she have any special qualities that set her apart from other people? If so, what were they?

A: There were very important women in all the organizations in the FMLN. She could relate much better to the other women in the other organizations. She broke the barriers of diplomacy. She brought discussions to a lower level. She built bridges and broke the barriers to communication. She provided for more frank discussions. She is the only one of the PRTC that remains in power [he is speaking about today]. Now in the FMLN there is democratization of the party. Roca [Roberto Roca, the former Secretary General of the PRTC who also served a term as an elected assemblyman] was dumped, she was re-elected. She keeps fluid communication among everyone. She's higher than the machismo attitudes of the men. She is very popular now with the people. Also she is popular because she is a woman and we are a matriarchal society. People appreciate a woman.

Q: Was she important? If so, why?

A: Yes, she has been a very consistent political figure throughout her life.

Q: Would you work for her again?

A: Definitely. Gladly. I never really liked the politics. Sometimes she was spread too thin. I criticized that in her. She was lax in security. Too many flashlights on, disadvantageous position. We hadn't mastered how to avoid air attacks. If she assigns you a task, she will hold you responsible. Constantly she encouraged you no matter what obstacles. She gave a lot of leeway that sometimes we didn't have in the guerrillas. She provided whatever was necessary. She tried to maximize our resources. [Essentially he was saying that she let them take the initiative and didn't "micro-manage" every task and he appreciated that]

Q: Can you tell me about her capture?

A: Her squad was all women radio operators. About 5 women. They all tried to cross a barren stretch of land about 200-300 meters across. Three were casualties and two escaped. Of the casualties, one was killed, Nidia was captured, and the other was wounded. I was on the other side of the hill and couldn't do anything. We thought she had escaped. We looked for her for a couple of days. She tried to kill herself after she was captured but she couldn't because she was strapped into the helicopter. We didn't detect that anyone had been captured and we constantly monitored the communications and had broken all the Army codes.

Q: How bad was the organization hurt when she was captured? How was her position filled?

A: Her capture was unfortunate but she skillfully turned her capture into a victory. It was a terrible shock to us. She had participated in the peace accords. In the press she said “You can skin me alive, but I will not betray my people.” We were lamenting her capture for months. Not only that, they had detected our weakness and they unleashed the air war on us. It was a desperate moment, I was really depressed. Other people were too, it was a terrible loss. When she came out so strong in the press we were pleased. Then the FMLN captured Duarte’s daughter and she was released for her along with about 50 other people. It was a short-lived depressive moment. In that sense, she turned her jail time into a victory, in that she became sort of like a myth. She was always determined not to be captured. So she isolated herself while captured. She became a symbol after that. That is part of the popularity that she enjoys now--persistent all the way to the end. I don’t think she was tortured as bad as other people have been. She was never really replaced. After she got out, she became an active part of the negotiating team, one of 5 organizations. She had much more liaison and communications with people of the FMLN. She was the only one who collapsed and cried when they committed to disarm the FMLN. Because her whole life she had worked for this and now it was being disbanded by the stroke of her own pen.

Q: Why didn’t she become the Secretary General?

A: She did. She was elected over everyone else and became Secretary General at the [PRTC] congress (middle of 1993) just before the signing of the peace accord (14 Feb 93) [the year is incorrect because the peace accord was signed in Jan 1992]. But she relinquished command and turned down the post. It wasn’t necessary to change leadership at this moment she said. She wanted Roca to take care of things since all the parties were going to dismantle. It would only have been for a couple of months. She wanted to let the guy who started it finish it. The PRTC dismantled at the beginning of 1994. It would have been better had she become Secretary General before because the leadership before that had been there for years and there were many contradictions that they had generated throughout the years. Nidia was the only cohesive force within the PRTC.

Q: What became of the documents she was carrying? How damaging was it that they were captured?

A: They were outdated documents. She was destroying documents. They had been buried for years. That is why we had settled there for a couple of weeks, so we could destroy them. The diagrams of missiles were only for illustrations of what could be done. We tried to introduce military books, soldier of fortune, anything that could help. We tried to keep a library of military literature. Other organizations got missiles but not the PRTC. We were the smallest organization. There were people who were trained to use the anti-air missiles. But if you don’t use them regularly, you lose proficiency. We brought 9 out during the 1979 offensive but we [not sure which faction he’s referring to here] didn’t hit anything. During 1983-1984, we had the military structures for a large army. We had brigades, etc. But we were forced to get back to smaller guerrilla units.

We were going to burn them because they [the documents] weren't of any use. If it was so incriminating why didn't they [the government or armed forces] confront her with it? The hubbub gave her a certain stature. It was a product of propaganda. She skillfully turned the situation against the system and came out ahead in the end.

Q: What was your perception of women fighters at the outset of the conflict? How did it change?

A: Initially men underestimated the women. We tried to separate the men and women. That didn't work. So we then provided contraceptives. But if you got someone pregnant we punished the guy. The troops used the motto: "Pregnancy is a casualty and you will be punished for it!" Both were seriously talked to about it. We separated them, because it was a hardship to take care of pregnant women. They had to ask permission to start a family. Bottom line, it was a deterrent to force them to use birth control. [He expressed serious concern for the unborn baby in a combat situation. It was no place to bring a child into the world] Some women got pregnant to get out of the war because they just wanted a way out. We tried to discourage pregnancy as much as possible because pregnancy meant the loss of a combatant. Then war became so crude and we armed everyone--children, old men, and women. We integrated everybody. It wasn't a matter of sex it was a matter of necessity. There were squads of men commanded by women. If you proved to be a leader, you were a leader. Twenty percent of combatants were women in all capacities: shooters, explosive experts, special forces, everything. What was very marked machismo at beginning of the war became very diluted by the end of the war. By the end of war, women were in all positions. Men and women shared kitchen and guard duties. There wasn't a position that I saw that didn't have women. Nidia was the absolute head/leader of San Vicente.

Q: What problems confront a woman specifically on the battlefield? Can they be overcome? How?

A: None. The stereotype that women are more cruel is bullshit. You perform to the extent of your ability. I combated with women who were much more courageous than me. They became squad and platoon leaders. You also have to have political sense. Men and women chickened out and there were men and women who were more courageous. I felt the same way that the women did on their first time in combat. It is the determination and skills that you assimilate and your training. It is not physical. I saw women do heroic things and give their life. I don't see any difference. In the beginning the men wanted to keep them in a subdued role. We broke through that in 1981-1982.

[After a little over 2 hours, we were cut off by the operator. He had an incoming important call. He agreed to speak with me again if necessary.]

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